

## THE SOUTH CAROLINA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION DEPARTMENT

**VR<sup>3</sup> Ready...Reliable...Results**

February 2013

## Drive, desire and determination lead to success



*Courtney Harper (center) receives the 2012 SCVRD Client Achievement Award from Gail Murray, Walterboro Area Supervisor (left) and Derle Lowder, SCVRD Agency Board Chairman (right).*

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When Courtney Harper first came to SCVRD's Walterboro area office she spoke very little and made no eye contact, staring at the floor. Diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome while in high school, she was so afraid of social situations that she could not tell a station attendant how much gas she wanted to pump or order her own food in a restaurant.

Though very intelligent, "she had no confidence, no self-esteem...the doctor's assessment was that she'd never be able to lead a normal, productive, independent life," says her mother, Peggy Hunt. "I found that to be unacceptable. I knew there was something out there for her."

Courtney began finding the answers at the Walterboro VR work training center. Her counselor, Allison Kitler (now center manager), began working with her and coordinated a plan to gradually bring her along in making her comfortable in the work training center environment. This included having Courtney set up at a station directly outside the office window of Vocational ACE/Job Preparedness Instructor Michelle Stockman in case she needed to come in for quiet, and wearing ear muffs and shaded safety glasses to tone down the noise and light.

The transition was difficult and Courtney left the center for a while. Kitler remained in close contact, encouraging Courtney to return, which she eventually did, with very encouraging results.

Her comfort level increased and she became active throughout the center. But when she walked into the center's woodwork area a new world opened up to her. "I just lit up. I wanted to learn it, I wanted to do all of it. I knew that's what I wanted to do for the rest of my life."

She became the most proficient trainee on the Walterboro center's footlocker contract that Job Readiness Training Associate Glen Ackerman

recognition. Courtney and her Job Readiness Training Associate Glen Ackerman had seen.

"He was her hero," says Hunt. "He brought her into something she dearly loved: taking nothing and making something with precision."



*(l to r) Gail Murray; Glen Ackerman, Job Readiness Training Associate; Allison Kitler, Center Manager (Courtney's counselor); and Derle Lowder, Agency Board Chairman.*

Her confidence bolstered, her skills developed and her desire for a career in the woodworking field soaring, Courtney was ready to move forward. Though she was still a bit scared, she enthusiastically participated in Stockman's classes, learning the soft skills needed to attain employment and succeed in the work environment.

"I tried to make her as comfortable as possible while we were doing mock interviews, so that when she went out she would know what to expect," explains Stockman.

Woodworking job searches by staff revealed an opening at PCI Cabinetworks in Harleyville, which produces high-end architectural woodwork. Courtney "aced" her interview and two-week job tryout and PCI hired her full time.

Her attention to detail, ability to learn the precision skills and strong work ethic have brought success in a job she loves. She has done precision cabinet and countertop work for major high-end projects, including renovations at the University of North Carolina.

Courtney hopes to work her way up in the business, and loves to "go out there and feel it, get sawdust all over me. I want to learn everything there is about this industry that I can."

"She's got a tremendous amount of assets and we're proud of what she's done," says PCI President Pat Wilkinson. "We look forward to a great future."

Roy Hair, PCI's Production Manager, agrees, adding, "I rely on Courtney. I'd take ten more just like her."

To the Walterboro VR staff, Courtney says, "I just want to say thank you. I would not be here today if not for all the people that are in this building and the dedication they have to all the people who come in and out of their doors every single day.

"I feel like I'm a different person. The biggest thing I got from this program was the confidence and the courage to know that I can do anything that I set my mind to."

## Commissioner's Medal of Excellence Winners



Cassandra (Cassie) Keeton (center), Central Control Specialist at the Charleston DDS office, receives the Medal of Excellence from Mark Wade (left), Assistant Commissioner, on behalf of Commissioner Barbara Hollis, and Blake Monson (right), DDS Regional Supervisor. Keeton was recognized for her stellar performance in assisting

claimants with compassion, enthusiasm and teamwork on the job, and for her many community efforts. "She consistently demonstrates a commitment to helping those in need," says Commissioner Barbara Hollis.

William B. "Birt" Dowling (right), CPE Psychologist II, Community and Client Relations department, received the Commissioner's Medal of Excellence for his extreme professionalism and expertise in helping staff take the proper direction in service provision and understanding and meeting client needs. The Commissioner also cited his going beyond his job description upon her request to assist with sensitive and difficult situations experienced by staff. "There is never a doubt that he is devoted to helping," she says.



## Business Partnership Award Winners

The following businesses were each honored at this year's SC Vocational Rehabilitation Association (SCVRA) Annual Meeting with a Business Partnership Award. Each has been instrumental in providing training and employment opportunities for VR clients.

Grainger Distribution Center, Fountain Inn



As a result of being a valued partner in our Skilled Workforce Apprentice Training (SWAT) program 11 clients are now permanent employees on a career path at Grainger.



Darlene Miller of Grainger Distribution Center (center) accepts the award from Dr. Roxzanne Breland (left), SCVRD Board Vice Chair; and David Turnipseed (right), Greenville Area Supervisor.

#### Bridgestone Americas Tire Operations, Aiken



A valued partner since 2008, Bridgestone has hired more than 20 clients over the past 4 years, several of whom have been promoted to lead positions.

(left to right) Rhonda Presha, SCVRD Agency Board member; Dennis Orwat of Bridgestone; Florence Hewitt of BUDD Group, a Bridgestone contractor; and Jeanette Murray, Aiken Area Supervisor

#### Industrial Conservation Engineering LLC, Lake City (ICE Recycling)



In the past year ICE Recycling provided skills development through contract work for 19 VR clients which resulted in 14 being directly hired.

(left to right) Butch Crawford, Co-Owner; Joseph Thomas, SCVRD Agency Board member; Larry T. Gay Jr., Co-Owner; Carol Anderson, Florence Area Supervisor; Jerry Neel, Florence Work Training Center Manager; David Wiggins, Williamsburg Business Development Specialist/Job Preparedness Coordinator; Jerry Taylor, Williamsburg Work Training Center Manager.

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#### Legislative Award Winner





The Hon. Murrell Smith (center), S.C. House of Representatives, receives the SCVRA Legislative Award from Derle Lowder Sr., SCVRD Agency Board Chairman (right) and John Hornsby, Sumter Area Supervisor. Rep. Smith was honored for his longtime support of the agency; he has been instrumental in the restoration of critical state funding for the agency. "He understands the issues that people with disabilities face in becoming a part of the workforce and he has worked adamantly to address those needs through his leadership at the State House," says Commissioner Barbara Hollis.

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### Divisional Award Winners



Tom Mayne (right), Client Services Specialist, receives the Administrator of the Year award from the SCVRA Administrators Association from Chad Ulmer, SCVRRA President.



Nancy Mitchum (left), was recognized by her peers with the Client Services Association award. Mitchum, Job Coach II in the Berkeley-Dorchester office, received the award from Ali Cato, CSA President.



Dr. Debra Price (left), Lead Psychologist in the Greenville DDS regional office, receives the Barry Cooper Leadership Award from the SC Association of Disability Examiners, presented by Chris Porter, Greenville DDS supervisor.



Nita Pridgen (right), Administrative Assistant in Client Services, accepts the Technical Services Association Award from Sam Hamilton, TSA President.

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### Richard M. Kuffel Excellence in Education Award Winner



The Laurens Transition Services Specialist (TSS) team was honored with the Kuffel Award for their achievement in school-to-work transition services in Laurens School District 55. VR staff and district personnel were recognized.

(left to right) Sonya Bryant, Laurens District 55 High School Principal; Chad Ulmer, SCVRD Laurens Area Supervisor; Carolyn Shortt, District Transition Coordinator; Margaret Alewine, SCVRD Director of Planning; Robert Shortt, District Assistant Superintendent; Mary Ginn, District Special Education Coordinator; Reco Wright, District Transition Services Specialist.



## Rep. Willis recognizes Laurens staff

In December state Representative Mark Willis visited the Laurens office to recognize three staff members as their spouses and co-workers looked on:



(l to r) Johnny Richard, JRT Associate, is recognized for 11 years of perfect attendance with no unscheduled absences by Rep. Willis.

Rep Willis (left) congratulates Tim Gary (right), Center Manager, for 10 years of service with the state of South Carolina.

(l to r) Donnie Estes, JRT Coordinator, is recognized for 9 years of perfect attendance with no unscheduled absences; Rep. Willis.

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## Did you know...

...that until 1956, VR counselors processed claims for Social Security disability benefits? Disability Determination Services began that year, and the number of cases doubled in 1972 when Supplemental Security Income (SSI) legislation was passed by Congress.

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## Events

### **Anderson/Oconee-Pickens**

- February 22, 11:30am to 1pm - **5th Annual State of Oconee Luncheon** at West Oak Middle School, 501 Westminster Hwy, Westminster, SC. Features how business infrastructure, workforce and quality of life "Position Oconee County for Success." For more information call 864-882-2097.

*For more information, call 864-224-6391 or 866-313-0082*

### **Enabling eligible South Carolinians with disabilities to prepare for, achieve and maintain competitive employment**

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